



...for the sake of the child

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Dear Member of Congress,

More than two million children and youth have parents on active duty, in the National Guard or the Reserve. Over 1.1 million of these children are school-age and approximately 80% attend public schools across the United States. Every school district in America has military-connected children and youth who are, in their way, serving our nation. They deserve the best we can give them. Therefore we, the undersigned, urge you to include the addition of a provision requiring a data element for military-connected children as you consider the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA).

Consider that a military-connected student who was a kindergartener in 2001 graduated from high school in 2014. Chances are high that one or both of this child's parents have been deployed, many up to three or more times. The anxiety and discontinuity that accompany separation from a parent and the disruption of changing schools is cumulative. In addition to separation from a parent, military-connected students move and change schools 6-9 times before completing high school, three times more frequently than their civilian classmates.

To repay that debt, Congress, the Department of Defense, and the military service branches have made tremendous advances and improvements in family readiness programs and in providing quality services. As a result, we know more than ever about these children and their needs; however, we do not know enough. Surprisingly, there is no consistent public school-based information about military children and youth school performance nor is there any state or national data. Absent this information, leaders and parents must guess about important decisions related to their children. Like other cohort groups of public school children – such as children in special education programs, children of poverty, and those who speak a language other than English – data about military-connected children should be collected and studied in order to understand their amplified need for attention from educators and special program supports.

Using applied research methods, these data can be collected and translated into reliable indicators that will inform thoughtful strategies, processes, and instructional practices that can make a real difference for children. Properly constructed, the data can divulge a deeper understanding of what is needed for children of different ages, in a variety of situations, in classrooms and school settings, allowing educators and communities to be more confident about how best to serve military children with complex challenges.

To this end, the Military Child Education Coalition (MCEC) and our partners support amending section 1501 of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) to direct State and Local Educational Agencies to collect data about military-connected students as a report-only subgroup. Quality *report-only* results can only begin with the implementation of the military-connected student identifier data element. These data will provide precision to know and monitor basic and essential questions: How are the kids doing in the schools they attend? What programs and practices are working – and under what conditions? From these practices, we can construct models that are scalable, can be customized without loss of integrity in execution, and have measurable outcomes. Family impacts will last a generation after the conclusion of any military engagement. After more than a decade of war and continued requirements for our all-volunteer Active Duty, National Guard and Reserve Forces, it is critical that we establish these measurement systems now. We ask for your support of this important initiative.

Respectfully requested,

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